Cultural Resources

BACKGROUND

New Orleans's unique history and culture led to the development of New Orleans jazz. The city was founded by the French (1718), ceded to Spain (1763), returned to France (1803), and almost immediately sold to the United States in the Louisiana Purchase. A rich amalgam of cultures formed in this city. The Creole culture was Catholic and both French- and Spanish-speaking. The American culture was Protestant and English-speaking. During the colonial period, enslaved West Africans were brought to the city so that at the beginning of the period of American dominion, nearly 50% of the city's population was of varied African descent, both free and enslaved.

After the Louisiana Purchase, English-speaking Anglo- and African-Americans moved into New Orleans. The newcomers began settling upriver from Canal Street and away from the already populated Vieux Carré. These settlements extended the city boundaries and created the "uptown" American sector.

In the early 19th century various African and African-American elements routinely began to be incorporated into the musical culture of the city and accepted as an integral part of the culture. Likewise, many African-Americans, especially the educated free people of color, participated in musical activities considered European in origin, thereby blurring many of the cultural differences that existed in other southern cities.

Also, during the 19th century German and Irish immigrants came to the city in greater numbers. The more affluent settled in and adjacent to the central business district, while the less prosperous settled in working class areas along both upriver (Irish Channel and downriver (Lower Marigny and) portions of New Orleans.

After the Civil War, and especially at the turn of the century, large numbers of Italians and other southern European immigrants arrived in New Orleans and moved into the lower Vieux Carré. Many of these immigrants also settled in the upriver and downriver working-class neighborhoods and some newer ones being developed in the "back-of-town" areas away from the river, interspersed with the existing African-American neighborhoods.

Each ethnic group contributed to the very active musical environment in the city, and before the 20th century African-Americans masquerading as Indians during the Carnival season, and especially on Mardi Gras Day, began to appear in their neighborhoods. Their demonstrations included drumming and call-and-response chanting that was strongly reminiscent of West African and Caribbean music.

The operatic tradition, common to both New Orleans and areas of the and the Gulf of Mexico, had an all-pervasive effect on the musical culture. New Orleans music was also impacted by the popular musical forms that proliferated throughout the United States following the Civil War, and marching bands expanded their already enormous popularity in the late 1880s. There was a growing national interest in syncopated musical styles influenced by African-American-inspired forms such as the cakewalk and minstrel tunes as well as the syncopated rhythms of Gyspy, Jewish, Celtic, Viennese, Mexican, and Cuban music. By the 1890s syncopated piano compositions, called ragtime, created a popular musical sensation, and brass bands began supplementing the standard march repertoire with syncopated "ragtime" marches.

A special collaborative relationship developed between brass bands in New Orleans and mutual aid and benevolent societies. While many organizations in New Orleans used brass bands in parades, concerts, political rallies, and funerals, African-Americans, in their own idiosyncratic manner, had their own expressive approach to funeral processions and parades that have the distinction of continuing to the present.

Over the last decade of the 19th century, groups such as downtown drummer and bandleader George “Papa Jack” Laine and his musicians (some unable to read music) improvised musical arrangements and began drawing larger audiences for dances and parades. cornet player and bandleader Charles “Buddy” began incorporating improvised blues and began livening up the tempo of familiar dance tunes. Bolden was credited by many early jazz men as the first musician to have a distinctive new style. In the 1890s repressive segregation laws increased discrimination against anyone of African descent, which ultimately united many black and Creoleof color musicians despite their differing styles and approaches to music.

The trend of combining improvisational musicians with polished music readers also occurred among Euro-American groups. Less formally trained Italians gradually began joining the ranks of highly trained German bands. Similarly, many white musicians, untrained in music and formerly associated with more formally trained Creoles of color, also began playing with Euro-American groups.

Most New Orleans events continued to be accompanied by music, and there were many opportunities for musicians to work. In addition to parades, bands played at dances, picnics, fish fries, political rallies, store openings, lawn parties, athletic events, church festivals, weddings, and funerals. Neighborhood social halls, some operated by mutual aid and benevolent societies or other civic organizations, frequently became the sites of banquets and dances. Consequently, sometime before 1900 African-American neighborhood organizations known as social aid and pleasure clubs began to spring up in the city. Similar in their neighborhood orientation to the mutual aid and benevolent societies, the purposes of social and pleasure clubs were to provide a social outlet for its members, provide community service, and parade as an expression of community pride. Such parading provided a dependable source of work for musicians and became an important training ground for young musical talent.

At the same time in many of the Euro-American working-class neighborhoods, marching clubs were formed, which replaced the benevolent societies as the groups moved into the social mainstream. The remaining groups of this type are now most active immediately before and during the Carnival season and are, with a few exceptions, concentrated in the uptown riverfront neighborhoods.

New Orleans jazz began to spread to other cities as the city's musicians joined riverboat bands and vaudeville, minstrel, and other show tours. With the release in 1917 of the first commercial jazz recording by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, New Orleans style jazz became a national craze. Over the next decade the spreading popularity of jazz caused many musicians to move away from New Orleans. Yet ,New Orleans musicians and musical styles continued to influence jazz nationally as the music went through numerous stylistic changes. Jazz became the unchallenged popular music of America during the Swing era of the 1930s and 1940s. Later innovations, such as bebop in the 1940s and avant-garde in the 1960s, departed further from the New Orleans tradition. In the late 1930s, recognizing that early jazz had been neglected and deserved serious study, some jazz enthusiasts turned back to traditional jazz. This interest in traditional jazz continues to the present. In 1987 Congress designated jazz as a national treasure.

SOCIAL AID AND PLEASURE CLUBS / BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATIONS

During the 19th century in the United States, many ethnic and emigrant groups formed mutual aid and benevolent societies to fulfill such functions as providing support to members during times of illness, accident, or death. In New Orleans, a special collaboration developed between brass bands and mutual aid and benevolent societies. Later social and pleasure clubs formed that fulfilled many of the same functions as the mutual aid and benevolent societies and provided a community service and a social outlet for its members. In addition to the funerals, these groups organized parades, which continue to the present to demonstrate neighborhood pride and solidarity. Each organization hires a brass band for parading and the quality of the music and band is a source of pride. Members of the organizations parade with the band while other neighborhood participants dance as "the second line" behind the official members and their contracted band. These traditions continue in New Orleans to the present and are living links to the city's jazz heritage.

MARDI GRAS INDIANS

The cultural groups known as Mardi Gras Indians formed in the late-19th century in the African-American communities. These groups parade on Mardi Gras Day and in March on St. Joseph's Night and "Super," wearing elaborate "hand-sewn" Indian costumes. They are accompanied by drummers, while the group members chant and dance.

Historically as one tribe encountered another violent confrontations could erupt, but these have been supplanted by competitive displays of dancing skill and the display of their stylized costumes. Today the Indians receive growing international recognition, and members often make appearances at various functions around New Orleans throughout the year. They continue to be a vibrant and living

cultural influence, preserving African-American dance and music heritage.

These groups have contributed to the development of rhythm and blues, and their activities have long been intertwined with the parading tradition of the city. The Indians always participate in the second line at community parades, and second liners also follow the Indians in the parade.

THE JAZZ PARADE TRADITION

The street parade tradition is over 100 years old and continues today. Mutual aid and benevolent societies still conduct funerals with jazz, and social and pleasure clubs regularly parade through neighborhoods with brass bands and accompanying second liners. Groups such as Doc Paulin's and the Algiers Brass Bands stick more closely to tradition, while others such as Rebirth and Treme Brass Bands use traditional and contemporary tunes infused with rhythm and blues, rock, hiphop, and other modern influences. Even though parading occurs to a certain extent in many of the New Orleans neighborhoods, it seems to be concentrated in the Gerttown, Central City, Treme, Sixth Ward, and Seventh Ward neighborhoods. Presently there

are more than 60 organizations that continue this tradition.

There are many neighborhood organizations that hold events related to New Orleans jazz, including the Treme Community Improvement Association. The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation sponsors community events, many with traditional jazz elements.

Funerals with jazz are an extension of the New Orleans's parade tradition. From the 19th century on brass bands were hired to accompany the deceased to the cemetery. While en route the bands played somber, stately music. After dismissing the body, the bands plays joyful, upbeat music as the mourners returned home.

HISTORICAL JAZZ COMMUNITIES

A number of areas in New Orleans made significant contributions to jazz. In general, these areas can be categorized as historic commercial areas, historic downtown neighborhoods, historic uptown neighborhoods, and historic west bank neighborhoods. As detailed in the 1993 *Special Resource Study*, the following have been recognized in each category.

Historic Commercial Areas: Storyville, Tango Belt, Back o' Town / South Rampart Street, Central Business District, and The Lakefront

Historic Downtown Neighborhoods: Treme, Sixth Ward, Seventh Ward, Eighth Ward, and Ninth Ward

Historic Uptown Neighborhoods: Central City, Irish Channel, Jefferson City, Gerttown, Carrollton, and Black Pearl

Historic West Bank Neighborhoods: Algiers, Gretna, and Westwego

The role and contribution of these communities in jazz history will be elaborated on in subsequent research and interpretive documents.

Historic Preservation

In accordance with the legislation establishing New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, the National Park Service is committed to promoting the preservation and interpretation of the historic conditions reflecting the birth and evolution of jazz music. Under the *General Management Plan*, NPS efforts would focus on areas of technical assistance, including the creation of partnerships and working with other groups, to effect those objectives.

In the 1993 *Special Resource Study* the Park Service began to identify early jazz sites and structures in New Orleans. Documentation for the earliest sites and structures proved to be fragmentary at best. Few scholarly efforts have concentrated on the physical areas where jazz musicians lived and played, and published research has often focused on either the music or the personalities of the people involved in jazz. Also, much jazz history is of an anecdotal nature or written by uncritical devotees of the music. Nonetheless, the 1993 study made a concerted effort to gather, consolidate, and analyze the information. This effort included preparing an inventory or sites and structures in the New Orleans area, as well as consulting existing written sources, the National Register of Historic Places, jazz experts, the general public, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Preservation of Jazz Advisory Commission. The process resulted in the compilation of 48 sites found in appendix D.

The National Park Service is using this list as a starting point to undertake a national historic landmark theme study focusing on early jazz sites in New Orleans. This study is required by the legislation that authorized New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park. The national historic landmark program is one way the federal government recognizes the national significance of properties. The Park Service conducts the landmarks program for the secretary of the interior, and it is an important aid to the preservation of outstanding historic places that are not in the national park system. Landmarks are nominated based on their study by cultural

resources professionals. Nominations are then evaluated by the National Park System Advisory Board, a committee of scholars and interested citizens. The board recommends properties that should be designated by the secretary of the interior; decisions on designation, however, rest with the secretary.

Thus far, determinations of significance have been drafted for several jazz properties with owner concurrence, and the nomination process is continuing. Early jazz sites and structures are thus important and worthy of recognition and preservation in the context of their overall neighborhoods.

One area of special significance is South Rampart Street. This area, consisting of the 400 block of South Rampart Street, contains several historic properties. Two of them, Frank Douroux's "Little Gem" Saloon and Louis Karnofsky's store, date to the period of early jazz development. Two others have been determined to be of national significance to early New Orleans jazz. These are the Odd Fellows/Masonic Hall and the Iroquois Theater.

The Odd Fellows Hall was a community social hall often used by various musical groups during the formative period of New Orleans jazz (ca. 1900–1910). Located on the top story of a three-story building, the hall was used by the band of the premier cornetist "Buddy" Bolden numerous times between 1896 and 1906. Bolden is acknowledged as one of the first and major innovators and practitioners of the improvisational music that coalesced into jazz. It was at Odd Fellows Hall, according to Bolden's biographer, "that his reputation was originally made." Other groups and individuals played in the hall, including Frankie Dusen's Eagle Band (which succeeded Bolden's band), the versatile John "Papa John" Joseph; banjoist/guitarist Willie Foster; bass player Bob Lyons; and clarinetist Alphonse Picou.

However, it was the legendary Bolden, the so-called "First Man of Jazz," whose association with the building gives it exceptional significance in the early history of jazz. Dances at the Odd Fellows Hall took place in what some attendees described as a "rough" atmosphere. In addition, during the 1917 to 1920 period the Odd Fellows Hall sponsored numerous parades that included jazz musicians. (Many musicians considered the corner of Rampart and Perdido, with the Odd Fellows Hall building and its integral Eagle Saloon, as their headquarters.) It is a principal site in the core area that witnessed the development of the spontaneously inventive form of music played with traditional six- or seven-piece bands headed by local luminaries, with Bolden a leader.

The Odd Fellows Hall is clearly, definitively, and outstandingly associated with the establishment of New Orleans jazz as a unique music that has contributed significantly to the broad patterns of American history and culture.

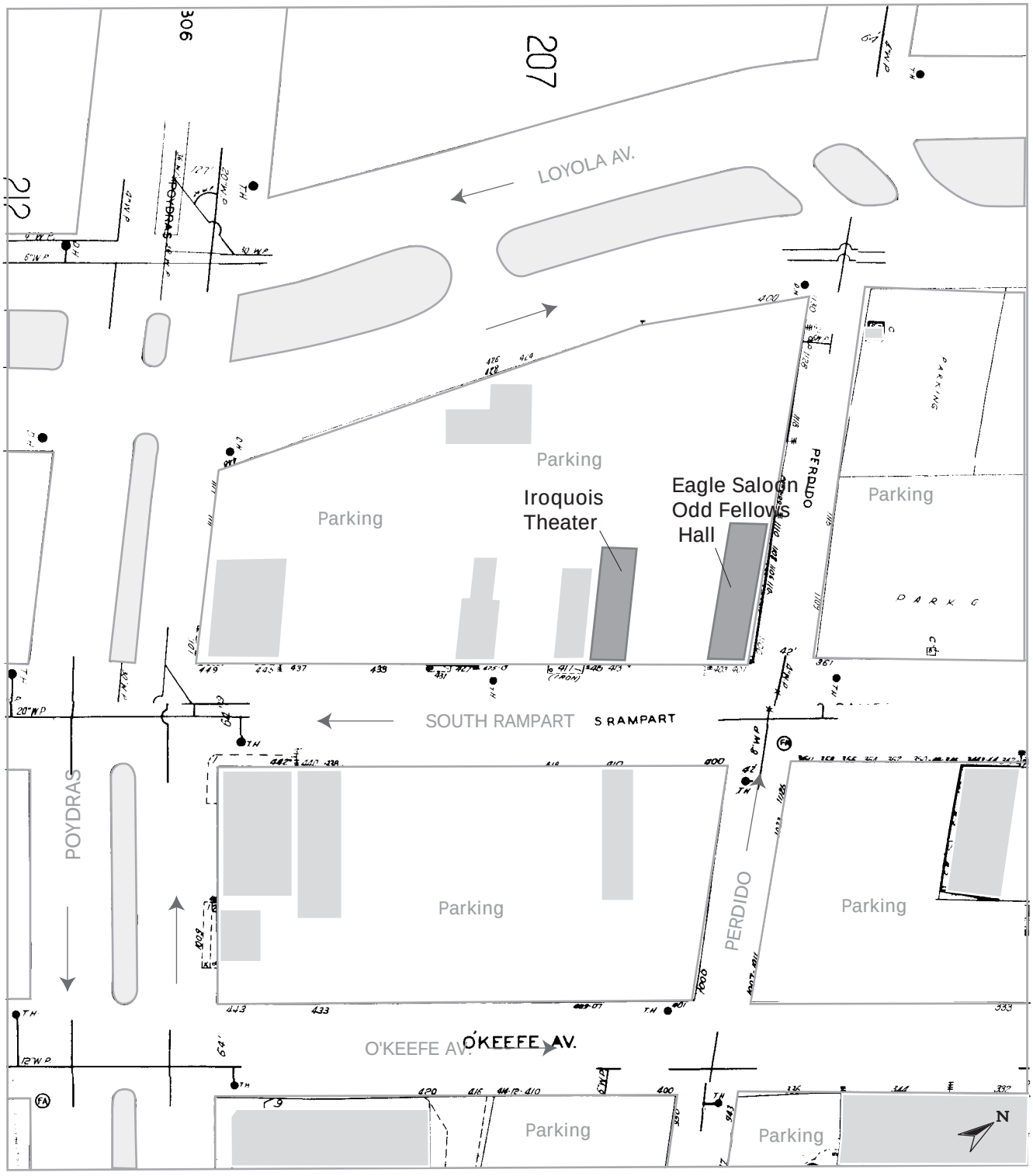
The two-story Iroquois Theater, an African-American vaudeville and motion picture house built in 1911, became a venue for the performance of jazz in New Orleans between 1912 and 1920, after which the building was used more exclusively as a motion picture theater until 1927, when it closed for good. The Iroquois' early period of use (ca. 1912–17) corresponded with the evolution of jazz in New Orleans. The many performers who appeared on the Iroquois stage included blues and jazz vocalists and musicians, among them artists whose innovative music had evolved in adjacent neighborhoods during the 1890s and 1900s and whose appearances at the theater often marked a commercial beginning for their crafts. At the Iroquois, an interactive, participatory kind of experience between performers and audience existed that affected an expression of cultural values among the African-American community.

Performers at the Iroquois during its heyday included many of those who likewise played cabarets in the New Orleans sector know as Storyville. Individual acts included singers, comedians, pianists, and other musicians, such as Butler "String Beans" May; the Too Sweets; Wade, Johnson, and Winn; Willie Jackson;

"Nooky" Johnson; Seals and Fisher; Charles Arrant; the Bruce Jazz Stock Company; Charles Ross; Louis "Two Bits" Scott; and Clarence Williams, some of whom later became prominent blues and jazz recording artists. In addition, some of the Iroquois' pit band members, including drummers Eddie "Rabbit" Robinson and Abbey "Chinee" Foster, later performed in important regional jazz bands.

While the Iroquois is locally important in the areas of entertainment, ethnic heritage, performing arts, and social history, it is likewise significant in the context of the evolution of New Orleans Jazz during the early decades of the 20th century. Activities at the Iroquois represent the building's associations with events significant to the traditions of the New Orleans community.

Because New Orleans Jazz became a national phenomenon during the period that followed, the Iroquois, as a promotional and commercial vehicle for early jazz, outstandingly represents the evolving form of a music that became popular throughout the nation and is nationally significant in the context of jazz history.



NEW ORLEANS Jazz NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

SOUTH RAMPART STREET AREA

New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park

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